Throughout the past year, COMSEVENTHFLT has overseen the execution of 160 exercises throughout the Indo-Western Pacific Area of Operations – the largest AO in the Navy encompassing half of the global population, 3,000 spoken languages, 36 partner and peer nations, and 7 of the world’s 10 largest military forces. In such a large and diverse Area of Operations (AO), these exercises are a key component in our plan to fulfill COMSEVENTHFLT’s Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) mission in Phase 0, in addition to providing critical opportunities for SEVENTHFLT staff and subordinate task forces to practice and hone warfighting skills. For our MOC, these exercises are overlaid on an intense 24-7/365 real-world battle rhythm focused on maintaining effective operational command and control of a force consisting of (on average) 50 ships, 10 submarines and 200 aircraft operating throughout the AO, supporting five U.S. defense treaties and refining contingency plans, in the process involving over half of the assigned SEVENTHFLT Staff, all while continuously acting as the primary tool of national power in the western Pacific Ocean, South China Sea and the eastern Indian Ocean in support of the rebalance to the Pacific. The only constant in the SEVENTHFLT AO is change; and that change is constant, somewhat foreseeable, and perpetually planned to by the MOC.

Challenges in the SEVETHFLT AO are many and varied: the tyranny of distance, historic animosities (between allies and potential adversaries alike), critical sea lanes, the growing economic influence of the PRC, and growth of military capabilities (most notably, the PRC). While it is easy to become bore-sighted on the narrative of the increased presence of the PRC inside the South China Sea as the most salient topic in theater, the “truth on the water” is far more nuanced than the daily headlines. The MOC routinely deals with readiness concerns, unit availability, scheduling and rescheduling issues, provocation by unstable actors, and maintaining “the bubble on the bubble”. Recently, SEVENTHFLT completed the USFF MOC Consistency and Advocacy (CAV) visit and Shore Manpower Requirements Determination visit – the first holistic assessment of manning requirements for SEVENTHFLT staff ever conducted.

We are forging ahead and experimenting with new C2 configurations with the development of PAC SAG (USS DECATUR, USS MOMSEN, and USS SPRUANCE) operating in the COMSEVENTHFLT AO while under the operational control (OPCON) of COMUSTHIRDFLT – learning how quickly we can shift TACON between numbered Fleet staffs and associated task forces as necessary to meet mission requirements. This configuration differs from our traditional C2 structure governing OPCON of dual carrier operations in the Philippine Sea acting
in concert with the USS RONALD REAGAN Strike Group. With a focus on operational art and operational designs the SEVENTHFLT standard, our subordinate task forces continue to improve products and processes. We are taking advantage of the opportunities inherent in our Continuation Of Operations (COOP) ashore to Fleet Activities Yokosuka during USS BLUE RIDGE’s year-long availability to renew our focus on providing the best advocacy for our subordinates, and the best service to our fleet.